

Skin Infections Associated with Contact Sports

Skin Infections

Skin lesions (such as boils, abrasions, rash, burns, cuts, and insect bites) can become infected by bacteria or viruses. A skin lesion that becomes infected is known as a skin infection.

Generally, if the lesion is red, warm, swollen, tender, or draining fluid or pus, it could be infected.

Skin Infections and Contact Sports

There are many different causes of skin infections. Some infections can be spread person to person through skin contact or by items that touch the skin (such as sporting equipment). While skin infections are not usually life-threatening, they can cause discomfort, or missed days of school, work, or practice. **Prevention is key!**

Athletes who participate in contact sports may have an increased risk of getting skin infections. Organizations that sponsor contact sports (such as schools or local youth organizations) should follow these guidelines to reduce skin infections among athletes.

- **Early Detection and Reporting** – coaches and athletes should be trained in first aid for treating wounds and should know how to recognize skin lesions that may be infectious to others.
- **Awareness** – an athlete with a suspected skin lesion should be excluded from practice and other athletic events until: lesions are completely healed, lesions can be completely covered by bandaging, or the player has written proof from a physician that the lesion has been treated and is no longer infectious to others.
- **Prevention** – Good hygiene is the key.
 - All athletes should shower (with soap) immediately after all practices and competitions.
 - All sports clothing, towels, etc. should be washed in hot water.
 - Discourage the sharing of towels and personal items such as razors, lotions, balms, lubricants, etc.
 - As much as possible, reduce sharing equipment that touches the skin, such as helmets, pads, body sensors, etc.
 - Shared athletic equipment such as face masks, pads that touch the body, mats, etc. closely monitored for contact with skin lesions. Disinfect equipment after each practice or competition.

Types of Organisms that Cause Skin Infections

Most common organisms that cause skin infections include the bacteria *Staphylococcus* (known as Staph), *Streptococcus* (known as Strep), the Herpes virus, and MRSA (known as Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)

For more information on skin infections associated with contact sports - contact the Utah Department of Health at 801-538-6191 or on the web visit:

www.health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/skininfect/ or contact the Local Health Department in your area.